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FM AMEMBASSY NIAMEY
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2838
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHAB/AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN PRIORITY 0253
RUEHDK/AMEMBASSY DAKAR PRIORITY 1780
RUEHNJ/AMEMBASSY NDJAMENA PRIORITY 1470
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 0456
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME PRIORITY 0230
RUEHTRO/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI PRIORITY
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS PRIORITY 0182

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DEPT: FOR AF/W, AND DS/IP/AF; PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [KCRM](#) [NG](#)

SUBJECT: 31 EUROPEAN TOURISTS SEIZED AND RELEASED BY
BANDITS IN NIGER DESERT

SUMMARY

¶1. On the afternoon of Monday August 21, a group of thirty-one tourists (thirty Italians and one German) were reportedly detained by a group of armed bandits near the eastern Nigerien oasis of Agadem. The group was released on the morning of Tuesday the 22nd. None of the tour group members were killed or injured, though the bandits did steal two out of the group's twelve four-wheel-drive vehicles. The tourists are currently proceeding north toward the nearest population center, Bilma, which lies approximately 200 km north of Agadem. Post hopes to receive additional information on the incident from Nigerien authorities who will interview the group upon their arrival in Bilma. No Amcits reside or work in this region of Niger. END SUMMARY

¶2. Post initially received information on the incident via open source European media reports on Tuesday the 22nd. Apparently, the German tourist escaped from the captive group and used a satellite phone to call the German embassy in Abidjan, Cote D'Ivoire. Post received a call from a Reuters news service reporter based in Dakar, requesting information. The Nigerien authorities initially seemed to lack information on the incident, unsurprisingly given the remoteness of Agadem. The government spokesman initially suggested that there were no more than two or three tourists involved. By Tuesday evening, the Minister of the Interior was able to report, in a local television interview on the incident, that the group had been freed and was on its way to Bilma. RSO office contacts have provided post with the most current and accurate information.

¶3. RSO contacts report that the group began its tour in Tunisia, and traveled via Libya to Chad. Apparently following traditional caravan routes, the group entered Niger near the eastern city of N'Guigmi (immediately north of the zone formerly occupied by Lake Chad) and proceeded north toward Bilma via N'Gourti and Agadem, a journey of some 500 km. Nigerien police have backtracked the route apparently used by the bandits to the Chadian border. Nigerien police contacts suspect that the group may be of Chadian origin, though, given the porous nature of the region's borders and the tendency of local nomadic groups to cross frontiers, the group's nationality cannot be determined.

¶4. Approximately one week prior to this incident a group of bandits attacked a convoy of cigarette trucks in the

northeastern corner of Niger, near the town of Madama (105 km south of the Libyan border). One Nigerien soldier was killed in the ensuing exchange of fire, and five cigarette trucks were stolen. Again, Nigerien authorities speculate that the bandits hailed from Chad.

15. Post will conduct an EAC meeting this afternoon, and will report additional information as it is obtained.
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